The hardships among lower-income earners and novices in the business world along sporadic insecurity that characterized Uwizeye's early entrepreneurial journey, helped in shaping her resilient character. Through persistence, hardwork, sacrifice, creativity and innovativeness, she transformed adversity into strength.

Born in 1973 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Louise Uwizeye's resilience isn't just a trait—it's a way of life forged by a complex and challenging upbringing. Her personal journey is a true testimony to the social and economic transformation, Rwanda has experienced in the last 30 years of rebuilding the nation destroyed by the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, during which more than one million lives were lost.

Today, Uwizeye stands as a successful businesswoman, devoted mother, and respected community leader.

She attributes much of her difficult childhood to the separation of her parents. When she was just 10 years old, they divorced—a turning point that forced her to take on adult responsibilities far too soon. As the eldest of five siblings, Uwizeye became the de facto head of the household, stepping in to provide and care for her family at a tender age.

The situation she faced made her mature much earlier and at 16 years of age she was already a breadwinner and caretaker shouldering most of the parental responsibilities to ensure her siblings grow up.

"The problems I encountered made me mature much earlier and at 16, I was already fending for my little brothers and sisters," recalled Uwizeye during a one-on-one with Rwanda Dispatch.

Uwizeye did whatever she could to get the means to raise the family. She would sell foodstuffs as early as 12 years of age.

Despite a difficult childhood, she completed her Secondary education. Increasing household responsibilities along hardships of raising a family soon became a toll and didn't further her education.

"I cut my education short after I had completed Secondary education level and focused on educating my siblings, it was a painful experience, but the only option." Uwizeye recalls.

Birth of Star Travel Agency

Uwizeye ventured into many businesses without success before she conceived the idea of establishing Star Travel Agency.

She attributes her success in business to her troubled past that prepared her for harder economic times that worsened when Covid-19 was declared in Rwanda, March 2020. Subsequently, she developed invaluable skills and experience that shaped her entrepreneurial path.

By the time she married in 1995 and came to Rwanda, she had already established herself as a progressive entrepreneur.

She saw opportunities where most people saw obstacles. After her first child, she pursued an English language course and ticketing certification to become more employable in a new economy.

“I knew education was key to advancing in a new country,” she says. Her determination paid off when she secured an internship in 1997, which led to a full-time position. With her modest salary, she invested in land, securing a better life for her family.

In 2006, Uwizeye joined Ethiopian Airlines where she worked for eight years. She resigned and took a leap of faith—this time into entrepreneurship.

“At first, I was afraid. Businesses come with risks, and I wasn’t sure if I was ready,” she admits. “But, after consulting with trusted mentors, I decided to take the plunge.” She started Star Travel Agency, a decision she has not regretted. Little did she know, then, that it was an opener to a turning point of her life.

Notably, Uwizeye has improved welfare of her family and educated them with three of them now pursuing their education in Canada.

In addition, her company employs four permanent workers.

Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic hit her business hard, with flight cancellations and travel restrictions. Fortunately, she had prepared for tough times – widened her income by engaging in other economic activities, including investment in real estate.

“When you have a plan and a backup plan, you can weather through any storm,” she says.



Leadership Prowess

Uwizeye’s responsibilities stretch from business to mentorship, mobilization and support of fellow women in her community towards improving their welfare. She believes that when you uplift a woman, you uplift an entire community.

Reflecting on Rwanda’s economic transformation under the leadership of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF – Inkotanyi) and H.E President Paul Kagame, Uwizeye commends the country’s stability and opportunities that have followed economic reforms and stressed that the enabling investment climate has translated in individual and national development.

“Living in a peaceful country has allowed me to grow my business,” she says.

As Rwanda moves to celebrate 31 years after liberation, Uwizeye’s story is a testament to the transformative power of hard work and women’s empowerment.

“Starting small is fine,” she says. “What matters is where you’re going.” Her journey stands as proof that resilience, determination, and a willingness to learn can lead to success, no matter where you start.